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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a funded project, Families and Neighborhood Schools (FANS), which provided coordinated services for selected at-risk middle school students. The FANS project, based at Bryson Middle School in Greenville County School District, South Carolina, collaborated with the county mental health center to offer school-based mental health services to students and their families. The project's staffing, budget, initiation, and collaboration, and role of school leaders are described. FANS also provided alternative functions: a collaborative, in-school, intervention plan for nonviolent criminal offenders; systemic interventions for at-risk students; and counseling for special education students. The project has reduced the social stigma of mental health issues. An 18-month evaluation of 59 sixth-graders indicated an increase in social bonding and improved academic performance. Although structural approaches vary by site, four components are constant in this type of school-based service delivery model. Such a program must: (1) address all student needs that hinder success in school; (2) include traditional clinical and nontraditional group approaches; (3) promote collegiality among the mental health and school staffs; and (4) constitute a true collaborative effort. A list of contact persons is included. Two tables and two figures are included. (LMI)

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WHAT DOES ONE LOOK LIKE? A SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY APPROACH

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WHAT DOES ONE LOOK LIKE? A SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE APPROACH¹

Introduction and Background

The 1990s are a time of "restructuring" in education. Mitchell and Beach (1993) identified six threads or themes in school restructuring, but they also asked, "If restructuring is the answer, what is the problem?" (p. 266). Although the problem of what restructuring will solve may not be clearly drawn, one of their six restructuring themes was "redefining the school service mix" (p. 255) which included adjusting the school mission and expanding school-site service delivery to students and others. How might this be done?

One successful two-year (1990-92) funded project provided coordinated services for selected at-risk middle school students (Hoover, 1992). The project, popularly called "Families And Neighborhood Schools" or FANS, has been continued (1993-94) by local initiative and presented to leaders in South Carolina as one model for similar efforts statewide.

Some Chilling Demographics and Some Potential Solutions

The school as a human services agency is the "in" thing to talk about in the mid 1990s. A few places (e.g., San Diego) have achieved publicity and recognition for early steps (Payzant, 1992). Although still more in the talking theory and development stages than in the operational mode, there is rising interest in turning the schoolhouse into a service agency providing more than the traditional "Three R's." Perhaps educator attention only or primarily to academics was realistic when two biological parents in the home with one working and the other available for child rearing and education support was the standard. Hodgkinson (1992) noted that the "Norman Rockwell family -- a working father, housewife mother and two children of public school age -- was SIX percent of all households for most of the decade (of the 1980s)" (p. 3. Emphasis in original). Times have changed.

A flurry of "restructuring" activities has been driving education reform. Although favorites such as site-based decision making, changed calendars, increased involvement and empowerment have garnered much attention, there have been few pilot efforts at providing social and support services through the school setting to youngsters who need help or who are defined as "at-risk" -- presumably at risk of not doing well in school or of not staying in school to graduation. Concern for the dropout seems well founded because of the problem of sheer numbers. However, the percentage of students completing high school has never been higher. [The NCES (1992) reports that in 1990 78% of persons in the US 25 years old and over had completed at least high school (p. 6).] Hodgkinson (1992) notes that the "fastest growing group in the US was prisoners, up 139%, from 466,371 in 1980 to 1,115,111 in 1990. We now have a higher percentage of our population behind bars than any other nation" (p. 3). Hodgkinson notes that 82% of these prisoners are high school dropouts and that "the best way to reduce crime rates is not to build more jails but to reduce the . . . dropout rate" (p. 3). Since the average cost per student is near \$4,000 and the cost for maintaining a prisoner exceeds \$23,000 per year, it seems to be a case of "pay now or pay much more later" as the advertisement says.

Although American education has had notable successes (see, for example, Berliner, 1993; Bracey, 1992, 1993; Carson, Huelskamp, & Woodall, 1991; Jaeger, 1992), public criticisms of education and most evaluations of education's progress point out that there is still plenty of room for improvement. Hodgkinson (1992) notes that the lowest 35% (education attainment) of America's school-age youth "is truly awful, due to factors that were present when they first knocked on the kindergarten door" (p. 8). The litany of problems of today's young people has been noted by others (e.g., Hamburg, 1992) and

includes poverty, low birth-weight, fetal-alcohol and in utero drug addiction, premature birth, born to teen parents or out-of-wedlock, malnutrition. . . . While this chilling list of problems calls out for greater concern for children and for early interventions, Hodgkinson (1992) notes that "as of this writing Head Start programs are reaching less than half of all eligible children" (p. 9).

Finn (1989) analyzed school dropout and found that most efforts were guided by a self-concept model that, really, had a difficult task as students were in schools such a short time of their total learning potential. By grade 12 a student is in formal schooling about 10% of the elapsed time. (By the start grade 9 this is about 11%.¹ He noted also a second model, more favored by other institutions than by education. The "participation/identification" model builds upon strategies to increase student involvement and participation in their schooling; educators can seek student identification with schooling as a positive event that is personally rewarding. A broadscale application of this concept is Invitational Theory (Purkey, 1992) and examples would be establishing opportunities for including students. (Rather than tryouts to "cut" students to get a small cheerleader squad, include all interested candidates in cheerleading.) Help the students identify with school as a "good" place to be. One way is to add services and activities to the "Three R's" as part of pervasive attempts to include all students in schooling (rather than sorting out and suspending or excluding some). This will require skill, imagination, creativity and considerable work, but the key elements are administratively mutable and clearly can be a focus for school restructuring ideas. Until such time as general approaches are operable district-wide, a first step may be introduction into schools of specific service-delivery projects. The FANS model provides one example.

Although "redefining the school service mix" (Mitchell & Beach, 1993) may still be in its early stages as a school restructuring process, the idea has already been the topic of the 1989 yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (NSSE). Kirst and McLaughlin (1989) envision the schoolhouse as a social service delivery hub for coordinated applications of the services of such agencies as recreation, health, employment, etc. Two national organizations teamed up to develop helpful guidelines for conceptualizing, planning and establishing multiple services provided at the school site (AASA and NSBA, 1992). The next step is to try out some ideas, evaluate them, and then place the results into the public forum for review and discussion. FANS is one example.

The FANS Initiative: Restructure with Service Delivery

The restructuring of school programs to include approaches to working with adolescents provides students with cognitive and affective support. FANS initially was funded through the Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP) of the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) and has involved the departments of Juvenile Justice, Mental Health, and Social Services as well as a school system. First, some context.

FANS is based at Bryson Middle School of The School District of Greenville County, South Carolina. During the initial phase of FANS (1990-92) Bryson, a rural/suburban school, housed 950 students in grades six, seven and eight (1200 students and a new building in 1993-94). Diverse demographics defined the student body. The school had won state awards for such things as drama, voluntary service, and business/education partnerships. Standardized test scores were at national averages. The average school attendance was approximately 96%.

Despite earned accolades, the school suffered from a negative image in the community because of past racial stigma and the problems associated with blending diverse socio-economic levels of students. Bryson was a dilapidated, non-airconditioned facility waiting to be closed in 1993. Sixteen portable classrooms dotted the campus. There were eight "floating" teachers.

Purpose and Description of FANS Program

Personnel from Bryson Middle School and Piedmont Center for Mental Health in Greenville County collaborated to offer school-based mental health services. A state-certified adolescent counselor provided clinical therapy for individual students and their families during the school day. Additionally, the counselor offered free voluntary group counseling on student-related and student-requested issues such as "Children of Divorce," "Stress Management," "Study Skills," "Conflict Resolution and Friendship Skills," and "Self-Esteem and Motivation." The counselor worked directly in the classrooms to assist teachers in any pertinent area to support the students.

Staffing

Initially FANS operated with only one full-time counselor based at Bryson. Limited clerical support came from the local mental health clinic. After six months the staff increased with a doctoral student of clinical psychology from the University of South Carolina for two days a week and with a former English teacher four days a week. The adolescent counselor and doctoral student conducted voluntary group and private sessions and assisted teachers. The former English teacher conducted voluntary group sessions and instructed students on study skills.

The teacher was a valuable resource because she gave FANS educational credibility with the Bryson staff. For the other members of the FANS staff who were acclimating to the demanding structure of a school day, the teacher served as a liaison and buffer and assisted ably in helping them understand the politics of a school and to interact with other professionals from a difficult perspective of service. The quick and friendly acceptance of FANS by Bryson's staff occurred in part because of the teacher's contributions to the team.

Budget and Summary

FANS was not expensive to initiate. Piedmont Mental Health Center provided the salaries and materials, including an IBM computer to network with the school's database programs on students. Bryson provided one office and reception area, converted from the custodial storage room, and copier access. Local businesses donated office furniture.

The costs shown in Table 1 represent the budget (1990-93) for FANS to serve adequately 1000+ students. Reimbursements were received for individual and family counseling through Medicaid, private insurance, and self-pay. Voluntary group sessions were free to students or parents.

Table 1 about here

After grant funding lapsed in 1992, staffing only for 1.5 counselors continued from Piedmont Mental Health. With funding of the doctoral candidate, Piedmont initiated another collaboration with the university system of South Carolina which directly impacted on Bryson. Professionals from the psychological services departments provided the following expertise:

- advise on testing,
- new curriculum used in group sessions,
- clinical resources for staffing difficult to serve children,

- professional research,
- reciprocal networking with other related departments and branches of the South Carolina University system and the South Carolina Department of Mental Health, and
- on-site training and counseling experiences for doctoral interns.

Initiation and Collaboration

FANS was originally funded for two years as part of a larger family service grant of the Piedmont Mental Health Center of Greenville County, South Carolina. A second part was a community-based service delivery model in Greenville's most impoverished housing area. Thus, community-based services was not a new approach; FANS working through a school site was.

The FANS efforts were built on collaboration of representatives and programs from education, and from juvenile justice, social services and law enforcement groups. A challenge, as Payzant (1992) also found in San Diego, was to coordinate relationships and to avoid "turf tussles" around the jurisdictional responsibilities of various groups.

Because of the success, Piedmont Center used state funds to continue FANS after the grant expired. The low client no-show rates in a school-based delivery model, the billing availability of Medicaid, and the program's justice alternatives to incarceration for juvenile offenders prompted the South Carolina Commissioner of Mental Health to support continued funding for FANS and to endorse its replication in other middle and elementary schools statewide.

Role of School Leaders

With funding limitations nationwide for education and other services, collaborative and creative methods are required to provide varied and integrated services to students. Once thought of as a core community agency, the public school has lost much of its influence academically and politically because of rising problems (drugs, teen violence), poor media reports, and national criticism. Educators lament that violence, substance abuse, decaying moral values, and academic apathy -- too often accompanied by parental indifference -- overrun schools. Social problems pupils bring with them to school often overwhelm the primary function of instruction and obliterate the appropriate student response: learning. By providing assistance to students and families in need of support for emotional, physical, or academic problems, FANS opened the door to improved education outcomes. FANS gave educators an additional tool to communicate effective parenting skills, positive school involvement, and academic emphasis.

Alternative Functions of FANS

In addition to mental health and social issues, FANS offered an alternative to incarceration of juvenile offenders. FANS anchored collaborative case management strategies for non-violent offenders of the criminal justice system through an in-school intervention plan to include teachers and administrators and personnel from the departments of juvenile justice, mental health, and social services.

A fourth function included systemic interventions for at-risk students. During an 18-month evaluation focusing on 59 of the 325 sixth graders, FANS was shown to be a pivotal support to academic achievement, school attendance, and appropriate social behavior. The at-risk sixth-graders (n=59) received biweekly counseling in small groups and in individual sessions as needed. School bonding increased; alienation decreased. Yearly cumulative grade-point average for the group was 2.06, or just

over "C"; attendance was 95%; and at-risk students assigned out-of-school suspension amounted to only 7% of the yearly total.

Table 2 about here

Without exception, the staff who conducted biweekly counseling sessions with the 59 sixth graders reported favorable reactions to their work with the students. The Black female assistant principal counseled all of the at-risk Black males (n=12) and also found them opportunities to interact with prominent local and state Black leaders. After the 18-month research, the students labeled as "at-risk" by their respective elementary schools because of past histories of truancy, academic failure, behavior problems, or dysfunctional family problems, had met or surpassed all of the project's objectives.

Benefits of FANS and targeted intervention strategies continued when these target students returned to Bryson to enter seventh grade (n=51). Comparison of grade-point averages for first quarters of 1991 and 1992 showed that these "at-risk" students earned 1.9 in the sixth-grade and 2.2 in seventh grade. Similar positive findings resulted for attendance and behavior.

Public Relations Benefits of FANS

Overcoming the social stigma of mental health issues from the community's perception took only three months. Focus groups of parents, teachers, students, and community leaders convened twice yearly from 1990 through 1992 to assess the needs of the school and community and to evaluate FANS' contribution to the solutions. Teacher's attitudes greatly improved about students and the students' social and personal needs. Teachers used FANS as a resource when they felt helpless to assist students with problems during a regular 50-minute class; e.g., problems related to incarcerated parents, drug addictions, health problems. When students responded to personal assistance, they also responded to academic instruction. Finally, students felt little social stigma about receiving mental health assistance from a counselor who was on the school staff and who saw them on campus during the day. For students who had been hospitalized in psychiatric units, the transition back into a school setting was easier when counselors, educators, parents, and students collaborated in case management. Students did not face their problems alone.

In addition to the successes of the work with the target group of 59 sixth graders, FANS had high marks in other efforts. The FANS representative addressed audiences across South Carolina about FANS as an innovative, collaborative restructuring model for both education and mental health site-based delivery models. FANS was highlighted in 1992 at the South Carolina Mental Health conference and in 1993 at two wellness seminars sponsored by the South Carolina Department of Education. FANS was presented to several state-based legislative committees for mental health, education, and children's services.

As an indicator of FANS impact, Bryson won top state awards for substance abuse prevention in both 1991 and 1992. FANS was also involved in the tutorial program at Bryson which Michelin sponsored in a business and education partnership. Bryson and Michelin won the top awards for Greenville and for South Carolina for volunteer service in 1992. Additionally, the principal was nominated as South Carolina Administrator in Business/Education Partnership. Based much on FANS successes, Bryson Middle School was invited as the only school from the two Carolinas to participate in a national effort sponsored by the Metropolitan Education Foundation to promote student achievement and welfare. Representative schools from eight continental regions convened in Columbia, South

Carolina, in 1993 to address the problems of today's students and to receive funding to implement local programs to alleviate the stressors.

Special Education Component of FANS

The FANS counselor counseled Emotionally Handicapped Self-Contained (EH-SC) students individually and in groups. Often extremely volatile, these students responded to a non-punitive strategy for controlling inappropriate behaviors. The increased exposure to positive intervention strategies assisted in integrating special education and mainstream programs.

Ideas Learned from FANS about Replication

Administrators must first assess staff attitudes regarding holistic student welfare. They may then approach mental health agency directors to discuss a collaborative effort to serve children. Subsequently, federal grant funding may be sought through the Children's Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP) of the National Institute of Mental Health or through other sources. After the logistics of collaboration and funding are explored, the most important aspect of replicating is to design a site-specific program. FANS is not a satellite mental health program; it is a program based on sound mental health principles organized to meet the particular and fluctuating needs of Bryson's students and community. It includes not only traditional counseling but also business/education tutoring programs, social components, and a wellness program for sound physical and mental health.

Programs similar to FANS have begun across South Carolina. Since FANS must be site-specific, structural approaches may vary; however, four components seem constant in this type of school-based service delivery model:

1. the program must address all needs of the student that hinder success in school;
2. the approach must include traditional clinical and non-traditional group approaches to problem alleviation;
3. the mental health staff must blend with the school staff to have credibility with staff, students, and parents;
4. a true collaborative effort must exist. Educators must acknowledge the impact of social problems on student achievement, and mental health personnel must adapt to the political demands and daily needs of a school setting.

Presently in South Carolina legislators are gathering support for FANS-type programs in schools across the state. They contend that the different "pots of monies" could be combined to combat the multitude of problems that youth endure. The South Carolina Juvenile Justice Task Force, the South Carolina Legislative Sub-Committee on Mental Health, and the South Carolina Department of Mental Health want to address these obstacles proactively. The school, with its student, family, and community contacts would serve as the hub of the services and would benefit in that its students would be less threatened by social and school pressures.

Replicating FANS involves a paradigm shift from fragmented, traditional services to working with students in a collaborative, case-management approach. Arguably, the school will assume more responsibilities in coordinating services. However, classroom teachers and administrators are not ignoring these problems now; they are simply not equipped to deal with them adequately with traditional approaches. Figures 1 and 2 show the shift in the service approach that occurs with a FANS program.

Figures 1 and 2 about here

In the traditional approach (Figure 1) no service organization has direct contact with another one. Agencies work through families in isolation, and the chance of every agency working with a family in a timely manner is unlikely merely because of the lack of communication. In Figure 2, a FANS counselor and an organized and trained team of other professionals coordinated needed student services and planned school programs. The school site connects students, families, and community services simultaneously.

The FANS approach is presently used in Greenville County in a feeder school pattern. One counselor serves an elementary and a middle school. The elementary students also have educational support from the "Cities in Schools" project designed to boost schooling opportunities through intensive business/education partnerships. The counselor works with a consistent student population from kindergarten through eighth grade.

At an inner-city Greenville high school, a case-management approach is being used to address the needs of students caught in the web of poverty, crime, drugs, and pregnancy. The former Bryson administrator, now a high school principal in Greenville, has established a Student Services Team (SST) comprised of counselors, teachers, and a parent. Piedmont Mental Health Center provides consulting support, staff development, and conducts focus groups to assist the SST in identifying the school and community problems. Negotiations are now underway to fund a mental health counselor for Woodmont High and its feeder middle school.

Educational Implications of FANS

Administrators can use the FANS approach for comprehensive student services to support the core curriculum. Alleviating students' pressures and stresses that hinder academic success and school bonding and diverting aggressive behaviors into more acceptable responses result in students more focused on the key purpose of schooling: learning. Additionally, the mental health personnel can provide staff development opportunities to educate school staffs on a comprehensive array of adolescent problems and systemic interventions. Armed with this knowledge plus pedagogy, educators can plan school programs and teaching strategies to motivate students at risk of academic failure. The overall result is a more positive school climate, teachers who understand the needs of their students, and students achieving at higher academic and social levels.

Summary

Using a holistic approach to assess the students' needs, focus groups of parents, students, teachers, and community leaders met twice yearly to assess FANS' goals. The FANS counselor and other school staff, including the administrators, counseled small groups of at-risk students biweekly to strengthen their identification and participation with school (Finn, 1989; Finn & Cox, 1992). Additionally, expanded cocurricular programs provided opportunities for more student involvement and success with school.

In operation, FANS addressed the key conceptual and theoretic elements for the expanded service delivery model. On-going evaluations of the FANS processes and the outcomes will offer information useful to policy makers and to leaders who wish to replicate and to improve on the FANS model.

Acknowledgments

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Footnotes

¹The math is fairly straightforward. Each year of schooling is about 180 days, with about 7 hours/day or 1260 hours. A pupil completing grade 8 (include K) has 9 years x 1260 hours or 11,340 hours of schooling. A pupil completing grade 8 with no retentions and entering K at age 5 (completing K at age 6) is 14 at the end of grade 8 and 18 at the end of grade 12.

A year has 365×24 hours or 8,760 hours/year (excluding leap years). So. . . 8760×14 years + 11,340 years of schooling is the basis for 11% of life in school by end of grade 8; $8760 \times 18 + (1260 \times 13)$ or 157,680 + 16,380 is the basis of 10% of life spent in school by end of grade 12.

Table 1
FANS Yearly Approximate Budget (1990-92)

Personnel	\$43,000
Mental Health Counselor III/12 months	\$43,000
Doctoral Student 2 days per week/12 months	
Former Teacher 4 days per week/10 months	
Telephone	\$600
Supplies	\$400
TOTAL	\$44,000

Table 2
Comparative Data (1991-92): At-Risk Students of Bryson Middle School Involved with FANS and Other Group

<u>Comparative Data</u>	<u>59 At-Risk 6th Graders</u>	<u>Other</u>
Attendance (%)	95%	95.7% (school-wide)
GPA	2.06	2.73 (other 266, 6th graders)
In-School Suspension (n)	31	545 (school-wide)
Out-of-School Suspension (n)	7	270 (school-wide)
Referrals to Department of Juvenile Justice (n)	1	3 (school-wide)
Systemic FANS Interventions for Affective/Academic Support (%)	100%	36% (school-wide)
(a) Duplicated, cumulative tallies.		

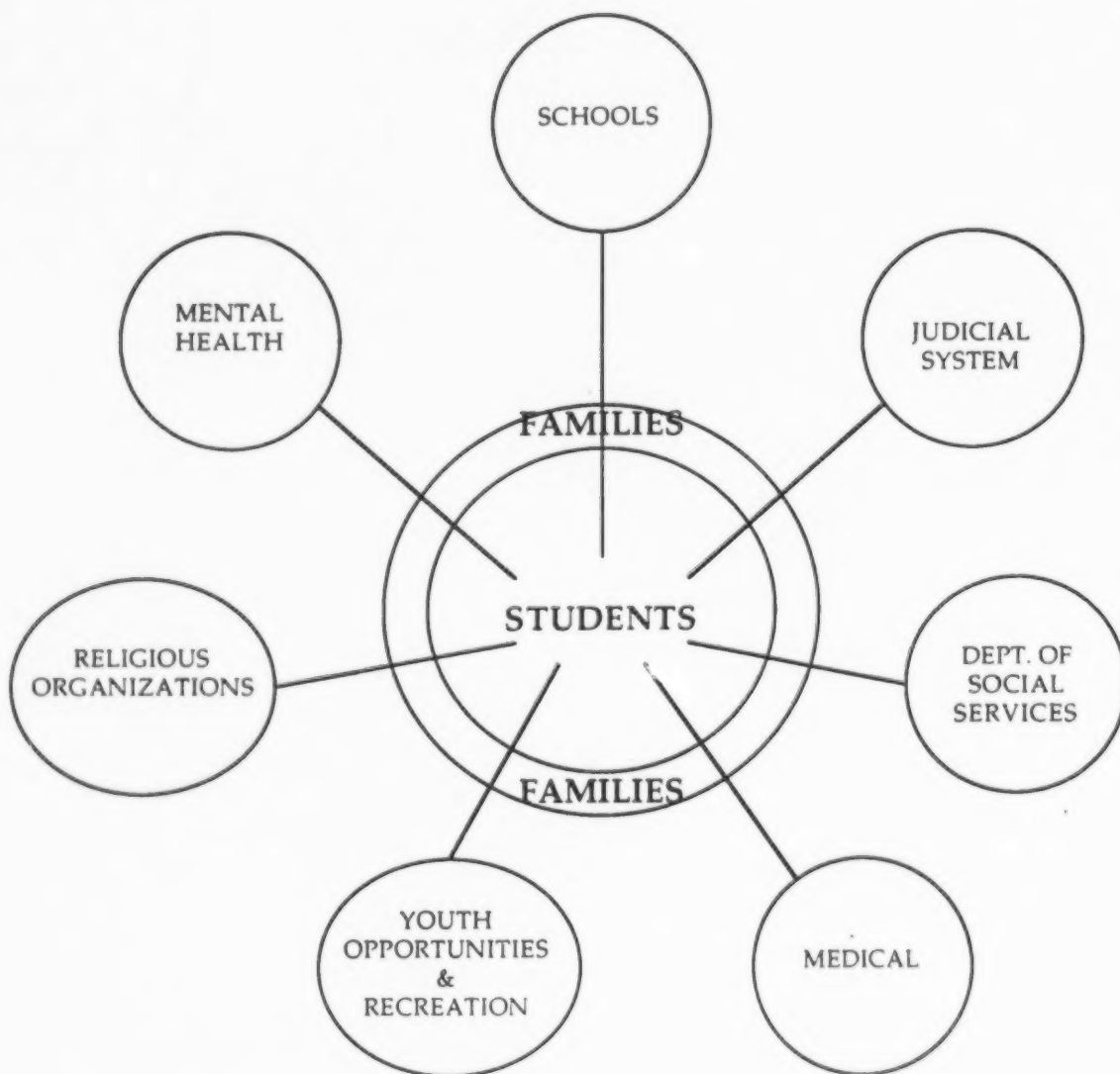


Figure 1. Traditional delivery model of human services to students.

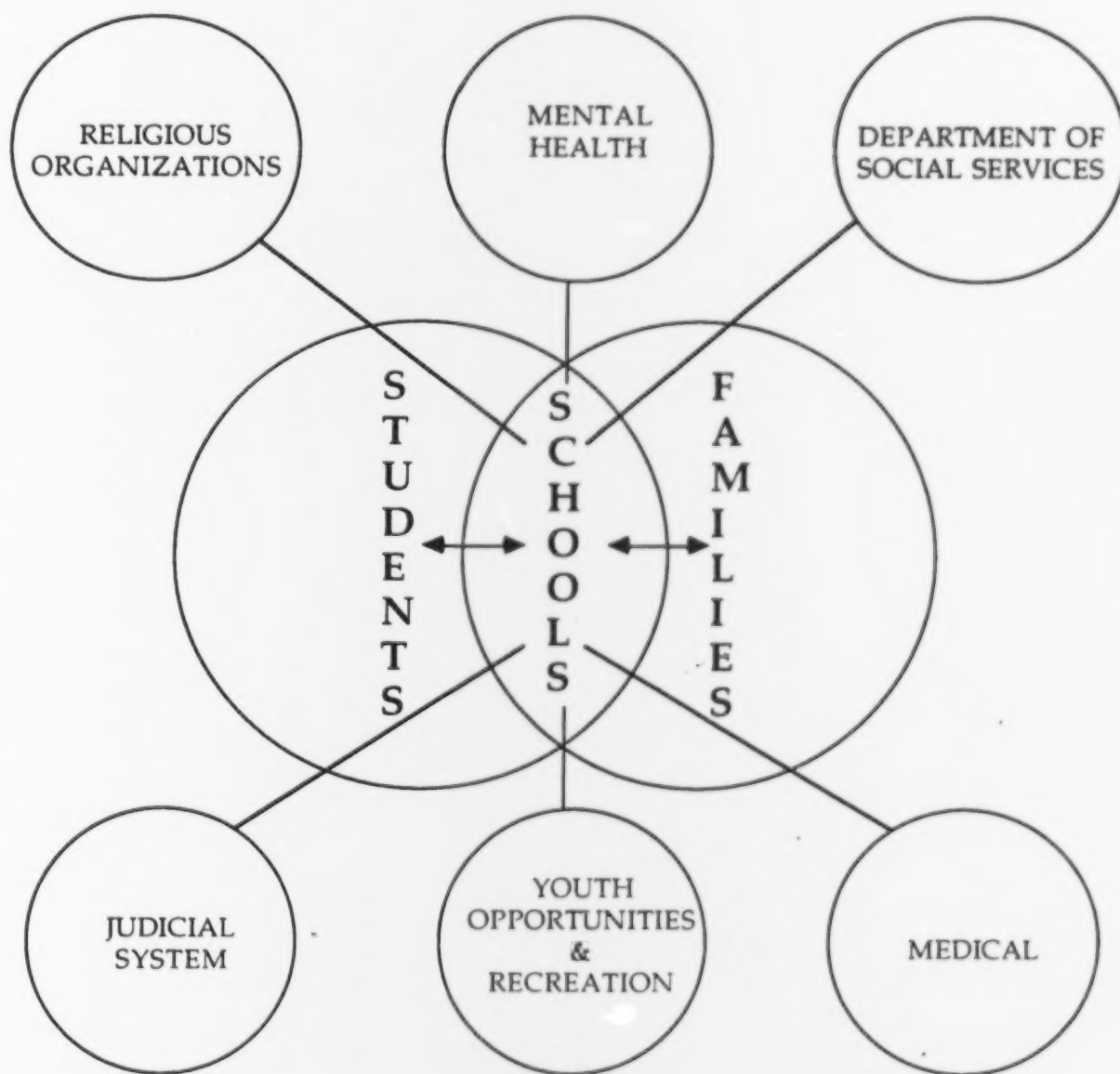


Figure 2. School-based delivery model of human services to students.